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ABSTRACT

A description is given of the Gifted Studies Network, established to meet the needs of teachers of the gifted. The purpose of the program is to work with local school districts and local educational agencies in the development and implementation of alternative methods of educating the gifted learner, using programs ordinarily not offered in the regular school setting. Local school districts and educational agencies, whether public, private, or independent, are invited to participate. To date, more than 15 agencies have participated and over 600 students have been served in a given year. The network is based on the principle of collaboration, to ensure that undergraduate and graduate programs are contemporary and responsive to existing needs of the field. Outreach experiences are designed to unite school district personnel and university personnel in a common effort. (JD)

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GIFTED AND CREATIVE STUDIES NETWORK:

A University Based School District Linked Program of Collaboration in the Area of Gifted Studies

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Gifted and Creative Studies Network:

A University Based School District Linked Program of Collaboration in the Area of Gifted Studies

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The Gifted Studies Network recognizes the needs of the gifted student and the needs of teachers of the gifted. The Network further recognizes and espouses as its primary purpose, to design and offer programs that satisfy the needs of gifted students and teachers of the gifted beyond those traditionally attended to, through existing local school district systems.

The purpose of this program is to work with local school districts and local educational agencies in the development and implementation of alternative methods of meeting the needs of the gifted learner. The focus of such efforts would be that, such programs ordinarily cannot be offered in the regular school setting. Local school districts and educational agencies, public, private, and independent are invited to participate. To date, more than 15 agencies have participated and over 600 students have been served in a given year.

As one of many programs within the Center for Education, the Network is driven by the basic principle of collaboration. The best way to ensure that undergraduate and graduate programs are contemporary and responsive to existing needs of the field, is to design and deliver outreach experiences that unite school district personnel and university personnel in a common effort.

Areas served, although not restricted to, emcompasses a radius of 25 miles from the University. There are exceptions of schools as far away as 200 miles that have participated, albeit in limited participation.

Teachers in graduate programs have come from further areas, most recently Winnepeg, Canada. Basically, however, the program serves routinely, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

According to a recent survey taken by a Texas-based educational research firm, "U.S. schools lacked the resourses to identify the gifted students and do not have the necessary curriculum materials or teachers to address this problem."

An estimated one in twenty children in elementary and secondary schools is gifted. One of the five best possible solutions suggested by the study, was collaboration between public and private schools and colleges.

From a historical perspective, collaboration between Widener and the middle and senior high schools began in 1983 when the University sponsored a pilot program for gifted and talented students prompted by the Rose Tree Media School District. The pilot was so successful that Widener was appointed by the Educational Information and Resource Center in Southern New Jersey as the educational contact for gifted and talented students from Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland.

In September of 1983, in response to a request from a local school district for services to meet the needs of exceptionally able gifted high school students, the formulation of a collaboration between Widener University and a Consortium of local school districts was begun. The University, that very same year, 1983, sponsored a pilot program for gifted and talented high school students in science. The program began with twelve students from one school district. In 1984, this program grew to include 40 additional students from five neighboring school districts. In 1989, up to 15 districts participated. Students participated in one or more sub-programs in science, math, philosophy, folklore, and other special topical areas. (See Table I for a description of sample programs presently in operation.)

Initial support for the Network came from the Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences in spirit and enthusiasm. The Associate Dean then brought this idea to the Dean of Arts and Sciences who endorsed the program as proposed, thereby providing administrative and fiscal support. A cadre of senior professors willingly gave participatory support and continue to do so.

Organizationally, the Gifted and Creative Studies Network is housed within the Center for Education. The Center for Education is within the College of Arts and Sciences. Decisions are made and policies are developed and referred through appropriate faculty committees for ultimate submission to the Dean of Arts and Sciences for policy implementation. (See Table II.)

TABLE I

Program Description	School Population	Potential Number of Clients	Actual	Percent of Clients
I. Rogate - Lecture Series for Gifted Middle School Students (Four offerings each year. Lectures are given by senior faculty in philosophy, science, social studies, folklore, and music. Lectures are held on Campus from 10:00 to 12:00 noon on the pre-determined dates. The goal is to provide in depth information to gifted middle school students in district requested topical areas.)	District Identified Gifted Middle School students in grades 6,7,8.	600 and Upwards Actual information not available	504	Estimate @ 80%
II. Staff Development Graduate Course Offerings Upper Merion School District - (A semester long offering in differentiating Curriculum for the Gifted. Goal is to help teachers to identify and program for curricular needs of identified gifted students within their classrooms.)	Population: District Teachers (all disciplines) grades)	Potential: 300	Actual: 42	Percent: 14%
III. Delaware - Certification in Gifted Program Offerings - Seaford School District, Seaford, Delaware. (The goal is to enable teachers to obtain Certification in teaching of the gifted.	Teachers K-12 (Designed for teachers presently or aspiring to teach gifted students in the Seaford School District)	Potential: 200	Actual: 22	Percent: 11%
IV. Staff Training in Gifted Studies (Inservice Workshops on differentiating curriculum for gifted students in grades 9-12 in language arts, social studies, math, and sciences. The goal is to enable teachers to be better able to differentiate curriculum for the gifted.)	Population: Teachers Grades 9-12 (Designed for teachers of language arts, social studies, math, and science in grades 9-12, who have responsibility for differentiating curriculum for the gifted.)	Potential: 30	Actual: 30	Percent: 11%
V. Rose Tree Media/Widener Summer School (A summer experience for gifted students in grades 6-7-8 in creative problem solving. The goal is to train students to be better creative producers.)	Population: Gifted Middle School Students in grades 6-7-8. (Designed for students who wish to be part of a summer experience which will better prepare them to be creative producers.)	Potential: 48	Actual: 27	Percent: 56%

Table II

Dean of Arts and Sciences

Assistant Dean of Center for Education

Director of Graduate Education

Gifted and Creative Studies Network Director

Network Advisory Council

School District Clients

The program is managed in a collegial manner by virtue of its design, in that the program is within the Center for Education and the Center for Education is within the College of Arts and Sciences. Program development and consequent programmatic proposals are developed in Committee, directed by and with support of Network Director acting by advisement of the Network Advisory Council.

Ultimately, the Dean of Arts and Sciences takes all recommendations under advisement. Recommendations have come from Advisory Council through Network Director to appropriate College/faculty committees and then back to Network Director for submission to Dean of Arts and Sciences. If approved, the Network Director is empowered to take action. If disapproved, decisions return to Advisory Council for reconsideration and reconceptualization as deemed appropriate.

The director of Network Program, after consultation with Advisory Council, meets with Dean of Arts and Sciences to recommend a management plan. Upon approval from the Dean, the Director is then empowered to act upon the submitted plan. In cases of the Dean's disapproval, the Network Director returns to Advisory Council for reconceptualization of plan and resubmission to Dean for approval. Programatic decisions are made jointly through discussion and review between Network Director and Advisory Council.

Director reports orally and in writing to Advisory Board. Programmatic decisions are then reviewed by the appropriate faculty committee for ultimate submission to Dean of Arts and Sciences for endorsement. Upon endorsement, program decisions are then a charge of the Network Director for implementation.

To date, there has been very little controversy. When controversies would occur, Advisory Council can be called together to meet and discuss issues of controversy. If no decision is mutually agreeable to all parties, then the Dean of Arts and Sciences may act as mediator.

This system as outlined allows for meaningful involvement of clients, by allowing clients to have a voice and vote on Network Advisory Council through a self-nominating or election process. Issues and concerns are raised, discussed, and consequently are responded to, by Network Director for feasibility and implementation.

Initially, at the inception of the program, a manageable policy was developed and experimentally implemented by the Network Director. At the end of year one, an advisory

council was appointed by the Network Director. Their input was solicited and responded to by the director. Shortly thereafter, in year two, by a voluntary rotation process, members were elected by their peers rather than appointed.

As a result of response to the Advisory Council and consequential endorsement of the Council, the Network Director formulates a written policy for Council review. After attainment of their endorsement, the Network Director submits the written policy document to the Assistant Dean of the Center for Education. The Assistant Dean then reviews this document with the Network Director for fiscal feasibility review. If satisfactory, the policy document is presented to the faculty of the Center for Education for endorsement. If unsatisfactory, then the Network Director is charged with returning the policy document to the Advisory Council for appropriate revision(s) and re-submission.

Input, processes, products, and outputs are assessed bi-annually. Outcomes are assessed annually. As a result of these assessments, the Network Director proposes a plan of responsiveness to expressed needs. Following are some examples of Network responsiveness:

Local school districts faced with declining enrollments in sophisticated areas of science brought this concern to the Network Director. The Network Director was able to arrange a meeting between district representatives and science faculty. As a result, a mentor collaborative program in science was implemented.

Specific students had a fascination and special interest in laser technology. A strand of lectures in laser technology was introduced. Teacher training workshops in this area were also introduced.

Several professors/presenters voiced some concerns as to the appropriateness of their pedagodical approach. District representatives agreed to observe, critique, and make recommendations for improvement. Such was done. Appropriate modifications resulted.

A local educational agency was in need of a summer experience for gifted students but had no funds for implementation. The University through the Network process agreed to staff and support such a program and absorb the cost.

Network program evaluation is viewed as the systematic process of collecting and analyzing data in order to determine whether, and to what degree, objectives have been,

or are being achieved, therefore, a continuous evaluation system is in place. The evaluation system involves having all groups evaluated by all other relevant groups, including both subordinates. For example, teachers/professors are evaluated by students other teacher/professors and program director. This effort requires numerous evaluation instruments to be approved and utilized. Most are designed by the Advisory Council and Network Director. These opinionaires are reviewed and tabulated annually for appropriateness. They are designed to be program specific. The program objectives are referenced for effectiveness and comparative effectiveness. Each workshop or lecture is evaluated by participants at the conclusion by virtue of a questionnaire. Each local school district agency is asked to complete the locally (advisory council designed) questionnaire annually. Results are tabulated and reviewed by the advisory council.

Quantitatively, analysis and tabulation of evaluatory instruments supports a sense of security and morale. Ratings both of self and of others are all within the high to high average range. Qualitatively, the expressions of gratitude for services in written communications from participating agents is plentiful. The willingness of professors who exhibited initial reluctance to participate, is evident. Professors volunteer to offer more sessions. Most importantly, professor participants and students are willing to take more risks in broadening topical areas and mode and manner of delivery.

Quantitatively, evaluation tabulations have demonstrated an incline from average to high average. Participant supervisors report a greater willingness to take on more sessions/class assignments with gifted students. Qualitatively, observers report greater observable traits of creative teaching and learning behavior in the classes taught by teacher workshop participants. Professors demonstrate a more positive attitude towards recognizing the need for differentiating curricular opportunities for the gifted student. Seemingly and reportedly, a decline in criticisms and unwillingness to work with gifted has occured.

Tabulation and analysis of evaluatory forms indicates marked program inmprovement. More local educational agencies are participating to the point of creating a facilities utilization crunch. Reportedly, outreach experiences through the Network have raised the consciousness of administrators of the University in that an effort to incorporate an honors program for undergraduates has been supported. Invitations to present Network program overview at national and regional conferences are many. Reportedly, local school district

proficiency tests show a marked improvement in those topical areas addressed by the Network. Student participants demonstrate more of a willingness to question and actively participate than at the inception of the program.

Significant accomplishments of the program are many. To highlight just a few, the following has occured since the inception of the program:

- Appointment of a full time Network Director to a tenure line track.
- Establishment of an annual summer program for gifted middle school students in creative problem solving.
- Willingness to introduce a Saturday morning program for gifted elementary school students.
- Inclusion of guest lecturers from other universities as a regular component of the "Rogate" lecture series for gifted middle school students.
- A willingness to and financial support of an annual colloquium with respected guest lecturers for teacher participants. Guest lecturers have included: Dr. Philip Phenix, Teachers college, Columbia, Dr. Charles Dwyer, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and Dr. Maxine Greene, Teachers College, Columbia. This design was introduced as a collaborative effort between the Network and Educational Leadership Doctoral Program.
- Collaborative staff development efforts in workshop offerings in creative and critical thinking. To date, a 14-week (2 1/2 hr. sessions) workshop in critical and creative thinking has been given in four local school districts by university faculty.
- Administrators of participating school districts have welcomed network efforts and invitations for return are many. Student lecturers on campus continue to be well attended. The requests for more offerings continue. Teachers and students who have participated in Network programs are able to successfully incorporate themes and experiences within their home school programs.

What is most unique about the Gifted and Creative Studies Network is that it is housed in the College of Arts and Sciences giving it university-wide credibility and visibility. A second unique feature is the full support of the university, encouraging program growth and expansion and at the same time absorbing all financial costs. (Further evidence is the willingness of the university to support release time for faculty to work with and in local school districts whenever possible.)

The university is also unique in its willingness to bring in a nationally known expert in the field of gifted education, Irving Sato, for the purpose of offering weekend teacher training in gifted studies.

For more information, contact:

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